

The Gift on the tree

December 21, 2008

You can see a tremendous difference between men's idea of gifts and ladies' idea of gifts. It starts from wrapping. Ladies want gifts to be pretty, but guys don't care. Actually, they prefer not to have some silly wrapping paper and ribbons. We just want contents.

One day I was about to walk out the door with a gift in my hand for one of my friend's birthday. My wife Karen asked me what that gift was for. I told her that it was a birthday gift for a friend. She asked me if I was going to wrap it or put it in a gift bag. I said, "No, I am gonna hand it to him just like this." She rolled her eyes up and said, "How can you give a gift like that?" "Easy," I said. "My friend doesn't care for wrapping paper and neither do I."

If everybody was like guys in general, Hallmark and American Greetings would be out of business rather quickly.

When I saw an American family's Christmas for the first time, I was astonished by the sheer amount of gifts under their Christmas tree. I came from a poor country where our parents used to get one toy for each kid or one for all the kids to share, none whatsoever.

While we are busy preparing to get gifts for others to put under the tree, we often forget about God's Gift to humankind on the tree. The true message of Christmas is not the gifts that we give to one another, it is Jesus whom the Father gave to us.

2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

It speaks of God's Gift of His only begotten Son Jesus. It was the greatest Gift of all to mankind. We must not forget it.

A. THE CHILD WAS BORN

Isaiah 9:6-7 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

As we look at our world, today we realize that part of the promise of Isaiah has not yet been fulfilled. The Child has been born. The Son has been given. But He has not yet taken the government upon His shoulders. We do not have peace with judgment and justice yet. But the good news is that there is coming a day when Christ will return. He will establish His kingdom on this earth. It will be a righteous rule from God Himself.

Before Jesus could take the government upon His shoulder, He had to take up the cross on His shoulder. Before He could wear the crown of glory as King of Kings and the Lord of lords, He had to wear a shameful crown of thorns and give His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The first time a star marked His arrival as a babe in a manger. But the next time He comes after the seven year Great Tribulation, the heavens will roll back like a scroll and all of the stars will fall from the sky and He Himself will light it with His glory. That is as known as the Second Coming of Christ.

Christ came to this earth. God came near to us so we can come near to Him. To give our life purpose and meaning. To forgive us of our sins and to give us the hope of heaven beyond the grave. Christmas is not about decorations on the front yard or shopping or presents. Christmas is not the gifts under the tree, rather it is the Gift of God that was given on the tree when Christ died there for our sin and gave us the gift of eternal life. That is the gift He extends. That is what Christmas is all about.

B. A RICHES-TO-RAGS STORY

Hebrews 2:8-9 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

The story of Jesus is not a Rags-To-Riches story. Rather, it is a Riches-To-Rags story. He went from the top to the bottom and not the other way around. He left heaven to come to this earth. He went from being a Sovereign immortal God to being a mere mortal man. He went from the glory of heaven to a dirty and smelly stable prepared for animals. The Savior of the world was not a monarch draped in gold and laid in ivory baby crib, but a baby wrapped in rags in an animals trough. As C. S. Lewis said, "The Son of God became a man, that men become sons of God."

Do we really understand how much our God Jesus sacrificed for us? Do you know any extremely important, rich, influential and powerful person who put everything aside to pay for the penalty of a death row inmate with his life so that the death row inmate may be set free? No one. Why would the Holy God do such a thing like that? Because of His love for us.

Long before there was the stable where Jesus was born, long before the first man Adam committed a sin in the Garden of Eden, a decision was made in the counsels of Trinity that the Father God would send His Son to die for us that we may have eternal lives.

None of us could enter into heaven because of our sinful nature and our own sins. But by the sacrificial death of Jesus, our sins have been forgiven and we have become holy by His blood. And by Jesus' resurrection, we now have eternal life in Him.

The gift on the tree, the crucifixion was not an afterthought of God, but it was a sovereign example of God's loving choice for mankind.

C. IMMANUEL – GOD WITH US

Matthew 1:18-25 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel

of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." 24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

The angel in Joseph's dream was quoting was Isaiah 7:14. Almost 670 some years before Jesus was born, prophet Isaiah penned this prophecy under the inspiration by God.

If you see an unmarried woman gets pregnant, you would come to a natural conclusion why she is pregnant. But in this case, it was the only exception in the history of mankind. That is the reason why an angel visited Joseph to convince him that it was by the Holy Spirit, not a man. It was done to fulfill the prophecy and Joseph was told to name the baby "Jesus," which means "Yahweh is Salvation".

Some would ask, "Why did they name Him 'Jesus' instead of 'Immanuel'?" Both names are mentioned here in Matthew 1. The name 'Jesus' describes His mission on earth, while 'Immanuel' describes who He was.

Apostle John also echoes this in his Gospel:

John 1:10-14 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus didn't come to earth because He was desperate for something.

Jesus didn't come to earth because His first plan for mankind didn't work out.

Jesus didn't come to earth because He wanted to show off His power.

But He came to set the captives free from bondage of satan and death. Because of the sinful nature within us and our own sin, all of us end up in grave. Anyone thinks that he or she is not a sinner should drive around grave yards. Each grave stone is a silent witness of the consequence of our sins.

The original man and woman were supposed to have sweet relationship and eternal life with God in the Garden of Eden. But when they committed a sin of disobedience by eating a forbidden fruit, they disqualified themselves from having eternal life and doomed to eternal death.

Since mankind can not come to God with his own righteousness, God came to us with His holiness that anyone who accepts His invitation can have eternal life. That is the reason why He came: to put us in touch with God, to forgive us of all of our sins, and to give our lives purpose and meaning.

D. NOT ABOUT THE GIFTS UNDER THE TREE

Christmas isn't about those gifts that you have under your Christmas tree now. All those things will be gone one day, some much sooner than others. All that will be left after this life is the human soul, and that will live forever.

You might have heard me using this illustration before, but it is worthwhile repeating: A mom was going through a busy shopping mall with an armful of shopping bags and two of her children who were busy pointing at every toy they see and telling her that they want them.

She had about had it with the busyness of the season and shopping, she told the children that they were going home. She led them to the elevator. When the elevator door opened, it was just about full. She barely pushed her children inside and got herself in.

After the elevator door was closed, without thinking she murmured aloud as a complain, "Whoever invented Christmas must be shot." A few chuckled. From a way in the back with a quiet voice someone said, "Don't worry, lady. We already hung Him on the cross." Nobody said a word all the way down to the parking garage.

Go celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus who came to die so that we may have eternal life in Him. Nothing wrong with exchanging gifts, but don't let it be your focal point of your Christmas.

By the way, don't say "Happy Holidays". Call it what it is. Jesus was not ashamed to be your Savior, why should you be ashamed to be His follower? You don't need to be politically correct, but be godly correct. Say "Merry Christmas!"